

Testimonial by Carla Kapeskas

March 24, 2019

Good morning everyone.

I am so happy and grateful to be here today with my family on this beautiful sunny day.

I was asked to talk to you for about 5 minutes

1. What brought my family to UUMAN
2. What has UUMAN provided us
3. The time we provide to UUMAN
4. And why we financially support UUMAN

Getting to UUMAN for me personally was a journey, and as such you have to bear with me and let me tell you a little bit of my journey.

I was born in Brazil. I only moved to the US when I was 30 years old with a corporate transfer.

I come from a family of immigrants. My mother's family came to Brasil in 1920, poor illiterate farmers from Spain. My dad moved to Brasil in his 30s, barely finished elementary school.

Rimas's family is from Lithuania, he is first American born generation in his family.

Our kids were born in Russia.

Do you see a trend here?

I am 100% latin. I fit the stereotype in some ways (although I hate stereotypes), I can be quite emotional and passionate, (and my daughter often makes bets I am going to cry when I am speaking in public) but I got from my dad the intensity of getting the job done and being pragmatic about life. I am very goal oriented.

After Rimas and I adopted the kids 15 years ago to the month we from time to time would have discussions on how to bring them up from a faith stand point. We were both raised Catholic (and a lot of what I will be saying now rings a bell with many of you). The concept of the holy trinity did not make any sense to us and so many other things in the church offended our senses and beliefs.

From time to time Rimas would bring up the issue and tell me we should bring them to church, if nothing else to learn what I call "church etiquette". Rimas is a good man in so many ways, but I am the one that gets things done and I knew that if I did not

do anything about that it would never happen, so I DID NOT DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

However, as the kids grew in Dunwoody in a predominantly white church going community we kept revisiting our goals faith and spiritual life.

Finally we decide we wanted the kids to be religion literate. We wanted them to know about all religions and respect them for what they are. We wanted to give them the freedom to choose their path. We also wanted a community that would convey to them our own principles and values.

I was completely ignorant about Unitarian Universalist. I don't like labels, they limit who we are and place us in a box, I still don't call myself an Unitarian Universalist. But this is by far the most comfortable place I have been when it comes to my beliefs in life, and I know that is true for Rimas as well.

So in December of 2016, after educating and reading about UU principles, I announced to my family that we would be looking for a congregation. I warned them to come and visit different congregations with me because they would get a vote on which one they liked the best, and if they did not come I would have the majority vote. So they complied.

I really liked all congregations we visited. However, 1 was too large, the other did not have a youth program, so UUMAN was a good choice because of the size of the youth program compared to the others, and because we were so welcomed here. This is why we chose UUMAN.

UUMAN provided to us the structure we needed to accomplish what we wanted for our family. I asked the kids yesterday why they like UUMAN, Luka said he feels he can be himself here and nobody is judging him, he also said he appreciates no "Jesus talk".

Vika has benefited enormously from her interaction with the youth program and specially from OWN. I have seen Vika advocate for transgenders in front of adults with a language and selfconfidence that were not there before. She is capable of doing that because of what she has learned from Randy and Allison and I am so grateful for that.

One of the first experiences we have had here was the White supremacy seminars last year moderated by Dave and Shelley with special guest Lyn. Those weeks were of discovery to me. They provided me the ability to reflect, they gave me language I did not possess before and a framework that has helped me in positioning myself when it comes to social justice and fight against racism.

When the tragedy of the crimes committed against the Muslim community in NZ took place last week, it felt personal to me because I now know people in the Muslim community in Roswell that I did not know before.

I know names and faces, I have broken bread with them and visited their home of prayer. They are not a vague concept to me. They are people I know. That was because of the relationships built through UUMAN.

It is clear to me that my passion in social justice was also nurtured here. So many here have given me the incentive and example that I needed to put my passion into action. After joining UUMAN I have become involved with the Sandy Springs Education Initiative and I volunteer weekly in their SAIL program. I have a mentee, his name is Adam, and hopefully I will be part of an effort that will place Adam in college, and as such, he will be the first member of his family to go to college.

I am also involved with the Fulton Remembrance Coalition, and I will put a plug for the two events we have this coming weeks that are also in your order of service. Our goal is to honor and remember the victims of lynchings in Fulton County with the soil collection and memorials that we hope to bring to Fulton County. You can read more about it on the website.

I have volunteered many hours at NFCC.

I am being considered for a board position in a non profit organization called Refugee Women's network. They help refugee women develop small businesses based on their abilities.

ALL these initiatives were made possible because of what I have experienced here. Because I believe that what we do outside these walls are as important or more than what we do here. I have drawn on the experience and leadership of so many of you to launch myself into the social justice world. I feel you have my back.

In two years as a member I have made friends here that I know will be my friends for life.

It seems necessary to tell you at this junction of my story why to contribute financially to UUMAN, - BUT I WILL because not only the basement wont be fixed without our money, without UUMAN a 15 year old girl would not have been able to defend a transgender person with confidence, my husband would not have his heart touched every time he comes to service, Luka would not have a place to be Luka, and I would not have had the chance to work on my passion which you have inspired and nurtured.

Thank you to all of you who work hard to make this place what it is.